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ABSTRACT

Public opinion regarding school-to-career programs was examined in two ways: a review of existing opinion data compiled by various national organizations and state and local school-to-career initiatives and a national survey of the attitudes of 1,200 registered voters. Although few people were familiar with the school-to-career concept, those who were familiar with it supported it solidly. Most of those surveyed believed that their children would not need vocational or occupational skills; however, they did want vocational education maintained for "other" children who would not be going to college. It was also believed that the skills required for college are different from those required for work and the schools are not doing an adequate job of preparing students for work or college. School-to-career was viewed as vocational education rather than an approach that helps all students. Students favored adding a career emphasis to their curriculum, and they valued learning good work habits and practical job skills. Students and educators wanted to see more courses relevant to life after graduation. The study's implications for communicating effectively about the school-to-career concept were discussed. (Contains a 23-item annotated bibliography and a list of the 11 surveys reviewed for this study.) (MN)

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Understanding Attitudes About School-to-Career

A Review of Public Opinion Data

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July 31, 1997

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Understanding Attitudes About School-to-Career: A Review of Public Opinion Data

by A-Plus Communications and Jobs for the Future

SUMMARY

Findings

- Few Americans are familiar with "school-to-career." However, solid support exists among those who are familiar with it.
- Americans believe that the skills required for college are different from those required for work.
- The public believes that schools are not doing an adequate job of preparing students for work *or* college.
- Most Americans believe that *their* children will go to college and therefore won't need vocational or occupational skills, but prefer to maintain traditional vocational education, primarily for *other* children, who won't go on to college.
- Americans often view school-to-career as vocational-technical education, rather than as an approach that helps *all* students achieve high academic standards and a relevant educational experience that will help them later.
- Americans would like to see more emphasis in schools on career and workforce skills.
- Americans have mixed views on when to start the emphasis on careers and workforce preparation.
- Students favor adding a career emphasis to their curriculum.
- Students value learning good work habits and practical job skills.
- Americans favor providing work experience for high school students.
- Students and educators want to see more courses that have relevance to life after graduation.

Communications Implications

- Connect school-to-career to higher standards and rigorous academics.
- Position school-to-career as a means toward improved academics and workforce and career preparation—not as a way of tracking students *away* from college.
- Understand where those who are opposed to school-to-career are coming from and work from there to counter their negative attitudes.

Introduction

School-to-career implementation has reached a point where it is essential to reassess direction and priorities. Since Congress passed the School to Work Opportunities Act of 1994, an infrastructure has been built to provide state and local funding for school-to-career, coordinate activities from federal education and training programs, and stimulate and support individual initiatives that meet the requirements of the legislation.

But the ultimate success of school-to-career will be judged on more than the changes in policy. As we approach the halfway mark in implementing the 1994 bill, we need to look beyond simply building the school-to-career infrastructure in states and school districts to see what will be needed to sustain these changes over time.

To do that, we will need the support of the consumers of these initiatives—the students, parents, educators, and employers who participate in them. These people are looking for results: tangible improvements in academic achievement and students' capacity to meet the demands of a high-tech, high-skill workplace. Without broad-based public support, the school-to-career approach will neither be demanded by parents and students nor have lasting impact.

Because of the relevance of this report's findings to what is needed to build support among critical audiences, this report will serve as the focal point of a pre-conference session on "Public Engagement for School-to-Career" at Jobs for the Future's 1997 National Leadership Forum on School-to-Career Transition.

Getting the support of these critical audiences means that those implementing school-to-career will have to listen to the needs of consumers and communicate better on *consumers'* terms, not theirs.

To get a better understanding of the attitudes and needs of these audiences, Jobs for the Future conducted two studies of public opinion research on school-to-career: a review of existing opinion data compiled by various national organizations and state and local school-to-career initiatives; and a survey of registered voters' attitudes toward school-to-career conducted after the 1996 elections.

This report documents the findings of this opinion research and their implications for communicating effectively about school-to-career.

Methodology

The information contained in this data review is the most comprehensive compilation of public opinion research regarding school-to-career issues. Jobs for the Future contracted the research and compilation of the data through A-Plus Communications.

National survey data were collected through The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at the University of Connecticut at Storrs, a nonprofit research library that houses the most complete database of publicly available materials for survey research. However, because few national surveys exist on this topic, we also reviewed focus group research that has been conducted in states and communities. The data were obtained by contacting every organization in the country that might have or know about public opinion research on school-to-career and related topics. Because the findings are specific to the community or state where the survey was conducted, we do not attempt to draw national or regional conclusions from the data, but have used them as a guide to future public opinion research that could be conducted.

In reviewing existing opinion data on school-to-career, we discovered that little research has been done nationally regarding the public's understanding of or attitudes about school-to-career. To collect baseline data, Jobs for the Future contracted Research/Strategy/Management, Inc. (R/S/M), one of the nation's premier public opinion research firms, to conduct a public opinion survey. R/S/M conducted 1,200 personal telephone interviews with registered voters nationwide. All respondents interviewed were randomly selected.

We have included in this report only public opinion data, dating back to 1990, that relate to how various audiences view the school-to-career approach or related issues. Although several state and local initiatives have conducted opinion research to get feedback from various audiences on particular design aspects of their school-to-career initiatives, we have not included those findings because the feedback cannot be generalized to help communicate with key audiences about the school-to-career approach. Nor have we included data on attitudes about school reform or academic standards, which provide information beyond the scope of this review. Attached to this report is an appendix of all organizations contacted through this search, all research obtained, and all relevant data included in this report.

FINDING 1: Few Americans are familiar with "school-to-career." However, solid support exists among those who are familiar with it.

How well known is the concept of school-to-career? The R/S/M survey tested the public's awareness of the concept as well as attitudes toward it.

Have you read, seen, or heard anything about "school-to-career" programs or approaches to education?

Yes, have heard	*33%*
No, haven't heard	*67%*

Source: Research/Strategy/Management, Inc., 1996

As might have been predicted, school-to-career is hardly a household term. Two-thirds of those surveyed had not heard of the approach. However, of the people who said they were familiar with the concept of school-to-career, those who had favorable impressions outnumbered those with unfavorable impressions by a 3-1 ratio.

Favorably impressed	*24%*
Unfavorably impressed	*8%*

Source: Research/Strategy/Management, Inc., 1996

Some states, such as Oregon, have conducted focus groups among their key audiences on their attitudes toward school-to-career. They have found that school audiences are largely aware of their state's school-to-career system and that all key audiences strongly support it.

- In Oregon, 96 percent of school administrators polled in a 1995 study commissioned by the Oregon Department of Education were aware of that state's school-to-career system. Fewer teachers (61 percent) and employers (41 percent) had heard of the system. A majority of respondents had favorable opinions of the school-to-career system.

If you had to decide today, would you favor or oppose the [Oregon school-to-career] system?

	Favor	Oppose	Not Sure
Administrators	68%	26%	6%
Teachers	56%	35%	9%
General Population	63%	28%	9%
Parents	58%	32%	10%
Employers	67%	27%	6%
Students	63%	31%	6%

Source: The Nelson Report, 1995

FINDING 2: Americans believe that the skills required for college are different from those required for work.

A variety of research studies have questioned Americans' beliefs about what skills are required in jobs and in college. Largely obtained through focus groups, the data suggest that Americans believe that certain skills—the basic skills—are needed in both college and jobs. We also sought to test the assumption, commonly held among policymakers and education reformers, that the skills needed for success in college are the same as those needed for success in work.

In your opinion, are the skills and knowledge required for success in college the same as or different from the skills and knowledge required for success in competing for a quality job directly from high school?

Same	25%
Different	64%
Don't Know	11%

Source: Research/Strategy/Management, Inc., 1996

How are the skills and knowledge required for success in competing for a quality job different from those required for success in college? More than one in five respondents to the national survey (22 percent) said that a college education was needed to compete in the job market. One in 10 (10 percent) said they believed that college graduates are more knowledgeable, or better qualified for a quality job, than those who don't go on to college. Seven percent said that high school students don't have basic skills, or aren't prepared. **These three opinions, together, reflect that four in 10 respondents**

(40 percent) believe that college is needed to obtain a quality job. Another 7 percent said that college does not represent the "real" world, that the "real" world is more competitive. **In other words, they believe that getting a good job is harder than getting into college.** (Research/Strategy/Management, Inc., 1996)

Furthermore, Americans view school primarily as a means of getting into college.

- Only 31 percent of respondents in *Assignment Incomplete,* a national study conducted by Public Agenda, agreed that the reason education is key to getting a job is that "schools teach people the kinds of knowledge and skills that help them on the job." (Johnson, 1995)

- Another study by Public Agenda, *The Westchester School-to-Work Initiative: Prospects and Challenges,* found that for students, "school was mostly about ... getting good grades to get into a good college ... Real learning and real skills seemed to be besides the point." (Farkas and Friedman, 1995)

FINDING 3: The public believes that schools are not doing an adequate job of preparing students for work *or* college.

Findings from various focus groups throughout the country indicate that neither students, taxpayers, employers, nor parents believe that schools are doing an adequate job of preparing students for careers.

- Students in Rochester, according to a focus group report for the Rochester Business Education Alliance, felt that "they were being short-changed and that their schools were not doing an adequate job of educating them for the future." (A-Plus Communications, 1996)

- This finding was confirmed by focus group data from the Kansas City School-to-Work Partnership. Among the changes students said they would like to see: smaller class sizes, safer schools, better technology, more rigorous classes, and better allocation of school resources. (Kansas City School-to-Work Partnership, 1995)

- On a statewide basis, Oregon residents were not impressed with the level of job skills taught in high schools. The general public (67 percent), parents (68 percent), employers (72 percent), and students (69 percent) felt that schools should be responsible for teaching job skills and career training to students; however, a majority of the general public (71 percent), parents

(67 percent), and students (69 percent) felt that high schools were not fulfilling this duty. (The Nelson Report, 1995)

- Only one in four students polled in a national survey conducted by Bruskin Goldring Research said their after-school training was helpful in developing job-specific skills they could use later. (National School-to-Work Office, 1994)

The general public and public school parents are much more satisfied with the way schools prepare students for college than the way schools prepare students for jobs.

- The 1996 *Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Annual Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools* asked a sample of the general public (age 18 or older) and also a sample of public school parents to grade schools on: preparation for college for those students who plan to attend and preparation for jobs for those students who do not plan to attend college. The results:

	General Public		*Public School Parents*	
	A & B	*C or below*	*A & B*	*C or below*
Preparation for college for those students who plan to attend	*49%*	*51%*	*51%*	*49%*
Preparation for jobs for those students who do not plan to attend college	*25%*	*75%*	*28%*	*72%*

Source: Elam, Rose and Gallup, 1996

The number of public school parents holding these beliefs has increased.

- Between 1983 and 1996, the percentage of public school parents giving "preparation for college" a grade of A or B rose from 38 to 51. During this same time period, the percentage of public school parents giving "preparation for jobs" a grade of A or B rose only slightly, from 26 to 28.

- On a regional level, a report on focus groups conducted by Public Agenda and the Westchester (N.Y.) Education Coalition, Inc. mentioned that "Educators and parents had [a] straightforward explanation for the lack of workforce skills: the schools were focused on getting kids to college." (Farkas and Friedman, 1995)

FINDING 4: Most Americans believe that *their* children will go to college and therefore won't need vocational or occupational skills, but prefer to maintain traditional vocational education, primarily for *other* children, who won't go on to college.

We found that, in addition to associating school-to-work with traditional vocational education, many Americans prefer a dual-track system of education, with one track for those who will go to college (mainly their children) and another for those who will go directly into the workforce (mainly other people's children).

- Focus groups conducted by Public Agenda in Westchester County (N.Y.) found that "most parents seem to view college as a requisite ... and would tend to steer their children away from a program they perceive is not intended for the college-bound." (Farkas and Friedman, 1995)

- When Oklahoma officials held focus groups on the OK School-to-Work Transition Program, parents admitted that "although they suggest vocational-technical options are worthwhile, most still want their children to pursue college. Generally they feel vo-tech is for other kids." (Oklahoma Department of Vocational and Technical Education, 1995)

- In Oregon, both the general public (56 percent) and parents (53 percent) prefer a dual-track system of education (strong academics for students who are going to college and a more vocational approach for those who aren't). Teachers, however, are split on the issue, and administrators (56 percent) favor a nontracking system. (The Nelson Report, 1995)

- Findings from a national study by Public Agenda reported in *Assignment Incomplete* showed that 54 percent of Americans said "college is not a realistic option for some kids so the schools should prepare them for jobs." (Johnson, 1995)

Because of the common association between school-to-career and vocational-technical approaches to education, we explored the attitudes behind that connection. Although our findings were not surprising, they are instructive for how we might reach audiences who hold this belief.

FINDING 5: Americans often view school-to-career as vocational-technical education, rather than as an approach that helps *all* students achieve high academic standards and a relevant educational experience that will help them later.

- A focus group report from Public Agenda states: "Perhaps the most critical problem confronting a school-to-work initiative is that parents and teachers are predisposed to lump it together with vocational training programs." (Farkas and Friedman, 1995)

The public has a negative view of vocational education.

- Students in Oklahoma maintained that "vo-tech still [holds] a second-class status," and the report on these focus groups later mentions that as long as school-to-career initiatives are seen as similar to vocational education, the initiatives will fail to gain support from parents and students. (Oklahoma Department of Vocational and Technical Education, 1994)

- The Public Agenda Westchester focus group report also notes that "vocational training programs are generally stigmatized, and seen as something to be avoided." (Farkas and Friedman, 1995)

FINDING 6: Americans would like to see more emphasis in schools on career and workforce skills.

Strong support exists for such a change.

Would you, personally, support or oppose a change in the public schools to place more emphasis on all students preparing for careers and obtaining workforce skills while they are still in school?

Support	*85%*
Oppose	*12%*
Don't Know	*3%*

Source: Research/Strategy/Management, Inc., 1996

Even stronger support exists for such a change when it affects people's own children.

Would you be comfortable or uncomfortable with your own children receiving this emphasis on careers and workforce skills whether or not they plan to go on to college?

Comfortable	*90.5%*
Uncomfortable	*4.5%*
Don't Know	*4.9%*

Source: Research/Strategy/Management, Inc., 1996

Finally, strong support exists among those who call themselves "born-agains."

	Born-Agains
Support	*87%*
Oppose	*10%*
Don't Know	*3%*

Source: Research/Strategy/Management, Inc., 1996

In other studies, we found that Americans support investments that prepare students for work.

- Eighty-two percent of the general public polled by the National Youth Employment Coalition supports public and private investments that prepare young people for work, careers, and self-sufficiency; respondents most often designated businesses in the community and state/local governments as their first choice for funding sources for employment and training programs for youth. (National Youth Employment Coalition, 1995)

Which of the following two choices is more important to this country's future?	
Having programs that prepare youth to enter the workforce and become productive workers	*82%*
Using the savings from money not spent on such programs to reduce taxes	*15%*

Source: National Youth Employment Coalition, 1995

Americans believe that schools need to pay more attention to workforce and career-preparation skills.

- When asked about the need for a "careers" emphasis in high school education reform, 60 percent of adults polled in a national study by The Gallup Organization and the National Career Development Association stated more should be done to help students acquire job skills. (National Career Development Association, 1995)

- This same group was polled on their perceptions of high schools' emphasis on "school-to-work skills." Respondents said that high schools do not pay enough attention to helping students do the following things:

Choose careers	*51%*
Acquire job skills	*60%*
Develop skills related to jobs now existing in their communities	*54%*
Obtain work after leaving school	*64%*
Learn how to use career information	*57%*
Develop job-getting skills	*58%*
Prepare for college	*37%*

Source: The National Career Development Association, 1995

FINDING 7: Americans have mixed views on when to start the emphasis on careers and workforce preparation.

We tested the assumption of education reformers and policymakers that the school-to-career approach to education is beneficial for students in all grades, not just for those in high school and that, to be beneficial in high school, students should have some exposure to the approach before high school.

In your opinion, at what point in a child's education should this emphasis on careers and workforce begin?

In elementary school	*21%*
In middle school	*44%*
In high school	*34%*

Source: Research/Strategy/Management, Inc., 1996

FINDING 8: Students favor adding a career emphasis to their curriculum.

- About half the teens surveyed in the recent Public Agenda study, *Getting By: What American Teenagers Really Think About Their Schools,* said that more job internships (54 percent) and closer scrutiny of high school diplomas by employers (50 percent) would help them learn a lot more. (Johnson and Farkas, 1997)

- Ninety-five percent of 500 teens polled in a 1994 survey conducted by Bruskin Goldring Research for the National School-to-Work Office of the U.S. Departments of Labor and Education said they were interested in learning about careers and skills they need to go to college or get into the workforce through a school-to-work initiative.

- Eighty-nine percent of teens polled in a survey for the National School-to-Work Office of the U.S. Departments of Labor and Education said they would be more interested in school if they were taught about careers that interested them, and 67 percent said school would be more interesting if part of their learning was done at work. (Bruskin Goldring Research, 1994)

FINDING 9: Students value learning good work habits and practical job skills.

- An overwhelming percentage of teens (86 percent) responded that good work habits, such as being responsible, on time, and disciplined, were "extremely" important for them to learn. A majority of students (59 percent) said that practical job skills for office and industry were also extremely important for them to learn. (Johnson and Farkas, 1997)

FINDING 10: Americans favor providing work experience for high school students.

- National Youth Employment Coalition data show that 61 percent of the members of the general public surveyed supported requiring high school students to obtain work experience outside of school as part of their high school program, and 83 percent said it was "critical" or "very important" that young people have paid work experience to make them self-sufficient.

FINDING 11: Students and educators want to see more courses that have relevance to life after graduation.

- Seventy-eight percent of Oregon students favor a program of career preparation in which "students who did not go to college would learn skills in high school to prepare them to directly enter the workforce and those who go on to college would learn the skills necessary to meet the requirements for college entry." (The Nelson Report, 1995)

- Students in Rochester (N.Y.) "want to see meaning in what they are doing in high school and how that work is relevant to what they will do when they graduate. They want their work in high school to be more relevant to them and would like to see real-life examples of how the choices they are making now directly affect their future." (A-Plus Communications, 1996)

- Educators in Kansas City said that "the educational system needs to put into the curriculum something meaningful which students can relate to their futures." (Kansas City School-to-Work Partnership, 1995)

Implications for Communicating Effectively About School-to-Career

The past few years have been a period of ambitious and creative experimentation with different school-to-career models as states and communities have worked to create a national school-to-career system. We have learned that the number of *consumers* of school-to-career initiatives is limited. This does not mean that there are no *customers*: Many states and local communities have the money to create school-to-career systems. However, few people, particularly parents, understand what we call "school-to-career"; they often confuse it with traditional vocational education and therefore do not see it as something for their own children.

They do, however, say that they want their children to obtain the workforce and career preparation skills necessary to succeed once they leave school.

Does that mean that we should redouble our efforts to "sell" school-to-career as *the* option for all students? No. It means we must learn more about what these important audiences want for their children and from their schools and position school-to-career as a way to get there. **To ensure success, school-to-career must return to two essential components that *all* audiences support: helping all students achieve high academic standards and giving young people a good start on a good career.**

This research suggests the following implications for how we attempt to communicate with and engage the public about school-to-career:

(1) **Support goes beyond name recognition.** It is not surprising that "school-to-career" is not a term familiar in most households. Many people in the country are unfamiliar with any education reform efforts. Few Americans (only 33 percent) had even heard of the school-to-work or school-to-career approach to education. However, among those who had, school-to-career's favorable ratio was 3-to-1. But even more encouraging was the overwhelmingly strong support for the things that school-to-career aims to do. People might not know school-to-career by name, but they like its attempts to make learning more relevant and results-oriented for young people and to better connect young people to the resources of the community.

(2) **Connect school-to-career to higher standards and rigorous academics.** Instead of trying to sell the school-to-career approach to the 67 percent of Americans who have never heard of it, we are likely to be much more successful if we better connect the *kinds of things school-to-career aims to do* with what people want from public education. The reality is that the cornerstones of all good school-to-career initiatives—high expectations, hands-on problem solving, real-world relevance—are just what many of our most important audiences want.

Parents want to see higher academic standards. They want to know what their child is expected to master in each grade. Students are begging for the adults in their lives to expect more from them. Raise the standards, they say, and we'll meet the challenge. Businesspeople want students with solid communication skills, an ability to work in teams, and a willingness to work hard.

Students want schoolwork to be relevant. Unless they see their work in school as real, many students say they have little incentive to work hard. Parents want their children to have the preparation they will need to get into a good school or obtain a high-quality job. Employers want workers who can apply book learning to real-world tasks and have some understanding of workplace skills and practices.

(3) **Position school-to-career as a means toward improved academics and workforce and career preparation—not as a way of tracking students *away* from college.** Most Americans believe it's important to prepare young people for jobs and careers; many believe this preparation should start early. At the same time, most people look at college as a gateway to a good job. They believe that competing in the job market right out of high school is tougher than competing when one is armed with a college degree.

Unless conversations about school-to-career occur in the broader and more positive context of higher academic standards and better preparation for life after high school (college, jobs/careers, citizenship, or all three), school-to-career's acceptance will be limited. We need to continually point out that these skills are important not just for those going to work, but for everybody. If we don't, people will continue to assume either that stronger academic preparation is needed only for students who go to college (which we know from the data that people see as a good option) or that stronger career preparation is needed only for people going to directly to work and not to college (an option we know people are not interested in for their own children).

We can argue that these are the wrong assumptions. But that's like beating our heads against the wall when there is no reason to do so. Again, a more sensible strategy is to help people understand that what school-to-career is all about is giving students just the kind of preparation that they need to succeed regardless of where they go after high school: a strong dose of the academic basics and a lot more. Moreover, the basics and more is just what parents, students, and the public want to see for today's students.

(4) **Understand the opposition.** Data, particularly from the R/S/M study, reveal that the idea of school-to-career as an initiative that provides a strong academic approach along with workforce and career preparation skills has an appeal that spans the political spectrum. Parents, regardless of whether they are liberal or conservative, Democrat or Republican, religious or not, want the same kinds of things for their children.

When differences arise, more than likely they center on the role of government. One of the most frequent charges made by the right about school-to-career is that schools should not be training students for jobs in multinational corporations. To counter this populist rhetoric, school-to-career advocates should consider the following strategies:

- Help people see that students in school-to-career programs are getting a very strong grounding in the academic basics—just the kind of preparation they'll need for college *and* for jobs. School-to-career is useful for those going directly to college.

- Demonstrate that career preparation is not incompatible with an education that focuses on high academic standards.

- Demonstrate that graduates of school-to-career programs are not uniformly "tracked" into jobs; indeed, a growing number end up going to college *before* entering the workforce. Rather than being tracked directly into the job market, significant percentages of students are going to college because of school-to-career. (For instance, as noted in Jobs for the Future's report *Promising Practices: A Study of Ten School-to-Career Programs*, between 77 percent and 84 percent of participating school-to-work students have enrolled in postsecondary programs.)

- Demonstrate that a growing number of school-to-career graduates who do not go to college are getting high-skill, high-wage jobs—not the kinds of jobs that their vo-tech predecessors had to settle for. School-to-career is not dressed-up vocational education.

- Encourage school-to-career advocates on Main Street, America, the small- and medium-sized businesses that are participating in our school-to-work initiatives, to counter the argument that school-to-career graduates are all being tracked into big-business jobs.

All of this provides important lessons for communicating effectively about school-to-career. Based on these findings, we know that it is necessary not to get hung up on what the approach is called, but to focus on what the approach is attempting to do. Few people recognize the term "school-to-career," but an

overwhelming majority of people are comfortable with its objectives. The energy and resources that might be put into trying to change the name or create awareness of the name would be better invested in trying to increase understanding of what the approach is all about.

The findings also have tested our assumptions about the attitudes of those we consider to be the opposition. Given the support we find among all constituencies, even those we have traditionally seen as opponents of school-to-career, we know that we need to keep communicating with these groups about what we all have in common: a desire for students to have the opportunity for rigorous academics and career preparation.

The findings also reinforce the notion that we do a disservice to those working to improve education when we do not make the connections between school-to-career and other education reform efforts, such as the movement to increase academic standards. We need to keep in mind the ultimate goal of school-to-career and all education reform efforts: more students achieving at higher academic standards and leaving school prepared for the challenges they will face as workers and citizens.

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About A-Plus Communications

A-Plus Communications, Inc. specializes in helping education reformers think strategically, listen well, and communicate more effectively with their publics—parents, citizens, teachers, business and civic leaders, and policymakers. We offer top-quality technical assistance, professional development, and publications—focused on practical solutions, how-to advice, success stories, and benchmarking against best practices.

A-Plus has worked extensively on workforce development and school-to-career issues. In 1995, A-Plus conducted the most extensive public opinion research ever done at a state level on public attitudes toward education and schools in California. This research consisted of a statewide survey and focus groups and produced a full research report, an executive summary of the findings, and a short video that shows highlights of the focus groups. A-Plus also conducted focus groups for the Rochester Business Education Alliance to determine how to gain the support of students to successfully implement learning standards. Other clients include groups such as The Business Roundtable; the Maryland Business Roundtable; the Washington Partnership for Learning; and the school districts of Cincinnati, Minneapolis, Philadelphia and San Diego.

Conducting market research to create strategies for building public support is exactly the kind of work for which A-Plus was created. Our firm grew out of the unfortunate failure of many of those who care about public education to engage successfully the questions of what the public thinks about the schools that belong to them: what they want those schools to do. We come at education issues with considerable commitment, substantial experience, and a dedication to helping our children succeed. We have learned a great deal about how to better communicate with the public about standards and educational change.

About Jobs for the Future

Jobs for the Future (JFF) is a national, nonprofit organization that conducts research, proposes policy innovation, designs systems, and provides technical assistance on the inter-related issues of work and learning. Founded in 1983, JFF's goal is to enhance economic security and access to opportunity for all individuals by strengthening the transitions and linkages between work and learning. JFF is one of the leading organizations in the country working to improve the school-to-career transition of all young people. JFF's Benchmark Communities Initiative—a partnership with the five communities of Boston, Louisville, Milwaukee, Philadelphia, and North Clackamas, OR—seeks to expand the scope and scale of school-to-career as a means of improving the achievement and career opportunities of all young people.

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